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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001270
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: MEK IRANIAN REFUGUEES STILL NOT WELCOME

REF: A. ANKARA 1210

[B](#). 07 ANKARA 1927

[C](#). SECSTATE 46682

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Over the past few weeks, the issue of MEK (Mujahideen-E-Khalq) Iranians entering Turkey has again come to the fore in Post's conversations with the GOT on refugee issues. At least 45 MEK Iranians are currently known to have entered Turkish territory from Iraq, nearly all having entered illegally. GOT officials are angered by what they perceive as active U.S. encouragement of illegal entry into Turkey by political migrants who are not welcome here. This issue has also contributed to deteriorating relations between the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the GOT. Some of the Iranians have already been deported from Turkey, and at least one reportedly died while crossing a river from Turkey into Iraq under duress by Turkish authorities. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During meetings on June 20 with visiting Ambassador Jim Foley, Special Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Affairs (Ref A), both MFA and Interior Ministry officials raised their concerns about MEK Iranians illegally entering Turkey from Iraq. They stated in no uncertain terms that these Iranians are not welcome in Turkey and will not be recognized by Turkish authorities as refugees or given exit permits for resettlement to third countries. They expressed concern that UNHCR "unilaterally" confers refugee status on MEK Iranians and frustration that no other country, including the U.S., is willing to accept these individuals for resettlement. At the same time, they worried that hosting the MEK Iranians here will harm Turkey's already fragile relations with neighboring Iran. They said they suspect the U.S. has intentionally diverted these people into Turkey. The issue of these MEK Iranians made Amb. Foley's meetings on the resettlement of Iraqi refugees at both the MFA and the Interior Ministry initially tense.

[1](#)3. (C) Turkish authorities are not shooting in the dark when they assume the U.S. is at least aware that the MEK Iranians are coming to Turkey. Post was aware of MNF-I plans to possibly assist the former inhabitants of Camp Ashraf to Turkey as of July 2007 and warned against doing so (Ref B), as the GOT was wary about such plans even then. Moreover, the MEK Iranians are presenting a letter from the Multi-National Force - Iraq (MNF-I) when they encounter Turkish authorities. UNHCR shared with Post a letter presented by one MEK Iranian. UNHCR states 29 Iranians who were previously held at Camp Ashraf in Northern Iraq have approached UNHCR - Ankara holding the same letter (UNHCR estimates there are 45 Iranians previously held at Camp Ashraf who are in Turkey now). The letter is on letterhead from MNF-I, Task Force 134, and reads:

Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)
Memorandum for Personnel Concerned

(Name) has been under United States protection. She is recognized as a refugee under the UNHCR mandate.

(Name) will be traveling out of the country of Iraq with her Government of Iraq issued Laissez Passer and is authorized to do so. It is her intent to obtain a visa at the border and cross into Turkey. This action has been approved by MNF-I

and the US Embassy, Baghdad, in conjunction with the Government of Iraq.

Sincerely,
(Signature)
Colonel, U.S. Army.

(C) Since the letters specifically state that U.S. Embassy, Baghdad, has approved the individual's attempt to cross the border into Turkey, the GOT's concerns about U.S. diversion of refugees into Turkey are hard to refute.

14. (C) In his meeting with Amb. Foley on June 19, and in another meeting with Ankara Consul General on June 30, UNHCR Representative in Turkey Michel Gaude lamented UNHCR's own deteriorating relations with the GOT and attributed the bad blood partly to the issue of the MEK Iranians present here. UNHCR-GOT relations took a sharp downturn following a UNHCR press release in April regarding the alleged deaths of UNHCR-recognized refugees, one of whom was an MEK Iranian, during their deportation from Turkey to Iraq (Ref C). Because the GOT does not recognize the MEK Iranians as refugees, authorities assert UNHCR has no right to publicly condemn their deportation from Turkey, a country they entered illegally. Both the MFA and Interior Ministry called Gaude in for tongue lashings following UNHCR's press release.

15. (C) In early June, UNHCR again approached the MFA to protest the refoulement of three MEK Iranians to Iran. Following that meeting, Gaude noted to Consul General his fear that GOT expulsion of UNHCR is a growing possibility. Equally worrisome, though, is the fact that one of the three refugees was injured during the deportation, then disappeared and may have died. In this case, the refugee fell into a hole and broke his leg while being marched to the Iranian border in the dark. The other two refugees were able to evade the Jandarma units who had dropped them off and ordered them to enter Iran. They later approached the UNHCR office in Van and explained what happened. According to Gaude, UNHCR chose not to make a press statement in this case, fearing its involvement would only make deportation more likely for the remaining MEK Iranians in Turkey.

16. (C) Comment: The arrival of at least 45 MEK Iranians in Turkey over the past year has angered Turkish authorities and harmed UNHCR-GOT relations. This situation could hinder our ability to reach the Department's goal of resettling 2,000 Iraqi refugees from Turkey to the U.S. this fiscal year, as it has irritated our much-needed contacts on refugee issues at the MFA and MOI. Moreover, the MEK Iranians have neither a durable solution in Turkey nor any hope of being resettled to a third country from Turkey in the near future. Post requests that USG entities in Iraq cease recommending Turkey as a destination and especially cease providing written affirmations to that effect that are undermining US and UNHCR interests in this country. End comment.

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WILSON